AMBROSE'S IDEA OF GOD'S SUPERABUNDANCE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF WORK IN THE TOWNELEY CYCLE

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The Towneley dramatist begins his construction of work in *The Creation*, where he portrays the highest reach of work: God forming the cosmos. God, as worker, establishes the paradigm by which all work within the cycle comes to be measured: his work is bounteous and gratuitous, materially as well as spiritually efficacious. A rich storehouse of patristic literature including hexameral commentary on God's work of creation served as a theological foundation for the dramatist. One very influential commentary on the six days of Creation, Ambrose's *Hexameron*, acknowledged for its widespread influence in the Latin West, provides an intelligible understanding of how the primordial God was commonly viewed by Corpus Christi dramatists and writers of the vernacular sources. Ambrose's homilies establish two key ideas about work that are germane to my study of several Old Testament plays to be discussed in this essay: *The Creation*, *The Killing of Abel*, *Noah*, and *Abraham*. These Ambrosian concepts—(1) God's superabundance; and (2) the system of equitable exchange inherent within the universe—provide the exegetical underpinnings for what the dramatist presents as an inventive and compelling depiction of work that elicits and culminates in Christ's death upon the cross. Not until the redemptive sacrifice is any work efficacious enough to redistribute God's bounty, including the sacred work performed by Christ's precursors (Abel, Noah, Isaac). Ambrose's ideas provide both a material foundation and a distributive impetus that serve to clarify how Christ, through the dynamics of his work, functions within the wider context of the cycle.[1] The implications are disturbing: work on earth, Ambrose's ideas suggest and the Towneley cycle demonstrates, can never achieve what it strives to gain.

Ambrose's commentary proclaims God Creator of the unquantifiable commodity (superabundance) and deems the cosmos a network of equitable exchange. However, the Towneley dramatist cleverly prefigures humankind's undercompensation through the collective character of the Cherubim even before the Fall of the Angels.[2] This concept of undercompensation can also be seen in terms of its metaphysical counterpart, human emptiness. Humankind appears to mitigate what is really a spiritual emptiness through negotiations ultimately revealed as counterproductive. Through so doing, humankind compensates itself as a way of bringing about fullness, albeit in a debased form.

In Towneley's *Creation* the Cherubim demonstrate an intuitive sense of their own undercompensation. Even though they bask in the presence of their Creator and within an atmosphere rife with ontic substance, the Cherubim perceive their brilliance as being somehow faulty, making God's plenitude appear to be withheld.[3] This prelapsarian environment, where the Cherubim respond to God's act of fullness, cannot be forgotten in the postlapsarian milieu, even though work in that domain reflects the curse. Old Testament plays to be discussed within this paper reveal how the dramatist crafts what becomes recognized as a dialectical phenomenon. This dynamic, discussed here for its dramatic efficacy, can also be understood in terms of its theological import.[4]

Within the Old Testament plays, God's fullness appears to provoke a response, whether characters intuit that commodity, transmute it into material form, or conceptualize it as mystical. For example, both Cain and Abel participate in and react to God's fullness. Throughout the cycle, God's bounty is shown as exacerbating humankind's plight, even when the source of the conflict between God and humankind is unrecognized as a spiritual one. However that plenitude is interpreted or construed, humankind nonetheless exhibits a heightened expectation of imminent redress. A building tension between divine fullness and

human emptiness is manifested most clearly in *The Creation* and *The Killing of Abel*, where God's bounty is shown as both out of reach yet tantalizingly accessible, intensifying humankind's desire for redistribution of the longed-for commodity (God's superabundance). Plays representing the patriarchs, *Noah* and *Abraham*, depict unmerited grace descending from on high, ennobling human labor while emphasizing more pointedly human futility without the gift of divine endowment.

The anticipatory fervor associated with the work of Christ's redemptive sacrifice cannot be comprehended without regard to Old Testament prefiguration. The work of Christ's precursors, while productive and expansive, is nonetheless *insufficient*, as I will demonstrate. Christ's work as enacted within the ministry and Passion sequences cannot be contextualized without reference to God's work, as interpreted through hexameral commentary.

The Importance of Ambrose

The influence of hexameral commentary upon medieval thought has been frequently discussed: Christian exegetes found the six days of creation, recounted in the first chapter of Genesis, a favorite subject of investigation. According to George Ovitt, Jr., two of the most influential commentaries were Basil of Caesarea's *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* and Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram*.[5] The model provided by Basil's commentary was followed closely by Saint Ambrose, who disseminated the work in the Latin West. David Fowler states that Augustine's commentary as provided in *The Confessions* (XI-XIII) and *De Genesi ad litteram* emphasizes the "metaphysical and theistic aspects" of God's work of creation rather than its physical aspects such as the birds and the beasts. Ambrose's commentary, he argues, is more biblical than Augustine's and therefore more indispensable to the hexameral tradition.[6]

Increased circulation of Ambrose's writings during the later

Middle Ages enhances the likelihood that the dramatist, whom scholars believe to have been a member of a religious order, consulted Ambrosian exegetical texts. Besides there being a documented resurgence of interest in the writings of the Church Fathers during the later Middle Ages, there is an indisputable correspondence between biblical exegesis and the plays. For example, V. A. Kolve explains that the Fathers used figural narrative, which had been employed by Christ himself, as a subject of investigation submitted to formal exegetical analysis; the use of figures is furthermore occasionally conveyed in the plays.[7] Robert A. Brawer has even argued that the Corpus Christi plays are practically indistinguishable from exegesis in that both forms offer a systematic presentation of history conveyed from a theological perspective.[8]

Ambrose's *Hexameron* was believed to have been delivered as a series of sermons during Holy Week 387.[9] In the commentary, Ambrose views God's superabundance as an overplenteous quantity emanating from who God is; his work can be nothing less than expansive. Biblical narrative establishes God as one who calculates the dimensions of the universe with weights and measures, who sits atop the globe-like earth, surveying its inhabitants (2, 3, 12; 6, 2, 7). In his homily on the third day of creation, Ambrose explains that God possesses the ability to enlarge space; how else, he asks, could so much water have been gathered up into one place so that the earth was able to appear? (3, 3, 14-15). The first manifestation of God's superabundance is the act of creation; yet that overplenitude also refers to the uncorrupted physical world, fresh from the Creator's hands. Ambrose delineates the richness of an environment supersaturated with the Creator's presence. The earth yielded bounty of its own accord; "though unplowed, [it] teemed with rich harvests." Inasmuch as no condemnation had yet occurred, the earth spontaneously produced fruits while the "word of God fructified on the earth" and the earth luxuriated in its own fecundity (3, 10, 45; 3, 8, 34). This

overbounteous state is a natural outgrowth of God, who can be characterized as "the fullness of the universe" (3, 10, 45). Further, the chief beneficiary of God's bounty remains man, who alone possesses a truth-discerning faculty and a soul, distinguishing him from God's other creations (6, 1, 2).

Besides substantiating God's fullness, Ambrose repeatedly uses the language of exchange. This language relates to the second Ambrosian idea mentioned previously: the equitable relationship inherent within the universe. The earth overcompensates one year for the bounty it has failed to produce the previous year (5, 8, 35). Dangerous plants have the beneficial effect of restoring health; because of their life-enhancing qualities, they actually increase God's bounty (3, 9, 38-41). God's superabundance is bequeathed to man, but man must return something to the source, more being payable from those blessed most abundantly (4, 2, 5). God, however, owes man nothing. Instead, the unmerited bounty reaped by man places him in a position of indebtedness (3, 17, 70).

Evil fits into this schematic plan only as the privation of good, since evil was not among God's creations (1, 8, 28-32). Whereas God sows good seed representing the kingdom of heaven, the enemy sows bad seed representing sin (3, 10, 44). Man must avoid evil or expunge it within himself before evil subsumes good. This basic principle is comprehended even by animals, who wisely avoid poisonous plants (1, 8, 31; 3, 9, 40).

Despite the destructive nature of evil, which grows in proportion to the space afforded to it, humankind's work still possesses a great potential for reward. Inasmuch as the earth still yields bounteous produce, that reward is sometimes material. However, there is an inverse relationship between material acquisition and spiritual benefit. As material acquisition becomes more bountiful, one's capacity for spiritual superabundance is deflated. Ambrose expresses this most succinctly in a related text, his treatise on *Cain and Abel*, through the well-known example of Zaccheus, a publican sinner, who scaled a sycamore tree in order

to see Christ entering Jerusalem. After Christ called Zaccheus down, instructing him to make his house ready for Christ's stay, Zaccheus readied his household by reversing the effects of his wrongdoing through making restitution for his avarice and thievery (2, 4, 16). In the same text, Ambrose depicts a comparable situation within the context of Cain's sacrifice. Cain amasses material bounty when he withholds the firstfruits of his harvest from God, while his spiritual bounty undergoes depletion, a loss equated with deprivation of God's favor (2, 6, 23).

Ambrose views God's superabundance as still accessible to humankind on an intermittent basis: crops sometimes yield produce rather than weeds, work is often rewarded instead of punished, tithing one's surplus occasionally generates even more plenty. Further, God's oversufficiency must be considered both a physical and a spiritual principle. Whereas man may have lost the full extent of God's plenitude to which he was entitled in Eden, spiritual reacquisition of that bounty is possible through sowing "the seeds of spiritual things." Even though worldly works may reflect the curse, spiritual works do not. As Ambrose states this principle: "If we sow what is carnal, we shall reap fruit that is carnal. If, however, we sow what is spiritual, we shall reap the fruit of the spirit." (*Paradise* 15, 77). Evil, the absence of good, shortcircuits the equitable relationship between God and man by shifting one's attention toward physical things, which can only deteriorate. Ambrose's God, like Boethius's, is the Supreme Good in whom happiness lies. As Philosophy expostulates in the *Consolatio*, "It is impossible for anything to be by nature better than that from which it is derived."[10]

Ambrose's consistent depiction of God enables us to comprehend how God's bounty, distributed within the cosmos through a system of rightful exchange, provides both the foundation and momentum for what we observe in the plays. His hexameral commentary furnishes an exegetical model that helps to explain how the dramatist depicts Christ's work within the wider

scope of the cycle. Ambrose's explanation of God as overabundant is rendered in distinctly physical terms. Yet that fullness is less concretely representable in the drama; hence, I have been referring to this bounty as the unquantifiable commodity. Further, Ambrose's idea of the universe as a system of equitable exchange enables another conceptual connection. By demonstrating how the cosmos operates judiciously, Ambrose provides a corollary which serves to clarify how the dramatist works all things together for good through the work-system reduplicated in the plays. Competitive forms of work enacted in the plays become seen not in tandem but for how they transform one another.

Ambrose establishes God's consummate fullness, bequeathed to man and to some degree appropriated by him, thus demystifying the relationship between God's work and humankind's work. Although the distribution of God's superabundance is not enabled until Christ's redemptive work, the Old Testament plays depict an escalating desire for this sacrifice. Before analyzing the Old Testament plays, each of which illustrates this tension differently, I wish to address two critical problems that arise when Ambrose's ideas are applied to the drama.

Ambrose and the Plays

When Ambrose employs the term "superabundant" to describe God's attribute, his exegetical analysis uses Scriptural reference, physical description, and allegory as ways of explaining the magnitude of that concept. However, the term "superabundant" seems inappropriate when applied to the drama insofar as substantiation is less readily demonstrable. Therefore, I wish to clarify that the negative and superlative prefixes associated with "super"(abundance) and "under"(compensation) enable us to ground God's paradigmatic work in dialogue, describing it and its relationship to humankind. Whereas I employ "superabundant" to refer to God's work and "undercompensation" to refer to

humankind's perception of deprivation, the terms are troublesome. The first problem arises when we call God's work "super"abundant in that no superlatives should be required to describe that exemplar being signified by the word "abundant" itself. The second problem arises when we say humankind perceives itself as undercompensated; to do so implies that the bounty associated with God's work of creation was not gratuitous. Compensation clearly means something owed or something due. The prefixes do reflect the necessity of establishing a fixed measuring point. Ambrose explains this quite clearly: "Although God is immeasurable, He nevertheless holds the measure of all things" (*Cain and Abel*, 1, 8, 30).

Further, Ambrose conceptualizes God as mythological, a construct that becomes challenged in the drama when God, partly because he is represented, becomes historicized. One of the ramifications of this historicization seems to be an undermining of the mythological construct or, at least, a confusion of its purpose. For example, David Mills has stated that within the mystery plays God must remain coherent; he cannot undergo psychological development. It therefore remains incumbent upon others to reveal God's character. Mills maintains that Cain, in *The Killing of Abel*, reveals God through speaking the same language of reciprocity as his Maker.[11] This approach, while it seems valid, historicizes God—entraps him within the fifteenth century as manifested in drama—and tends to demythologize him. The tension between God's superabundance and humankind's undercompensation occurs, I contend, at that point of intersection where divine time intersects with temporal time. For example, during *The Creation*, it seems to me that the Cherubim recite the cosmogonic myth. Simultaneously entrapped within the mystery plays and reentering sacred time through narrating the myth, they reflect a prefigured underacquisition of which they profess no knowledge. The very moment celebrated in the creation myth, when God establishes his superabundance as the primordial model for all work, transforms humankind's work.

Yet without a conduit to effect this transformation, humankind is deprived of apparatus; it has no method of reconnecting with the divine exemplar, of recouping lost bounty. No such *axis mundi* exists until the Incarnation. While God's work of reacquiring humankind seems to reach forward, inasmuch as the soteriological benefits of Christ's redemptive work reach beyond each current age, humankind's reacquisition of God's superabundance moves backward. In biblical narrative, Christ repeatedly refers the bounty of his work—for instance, the multiplied loaves—toward its reference in the source: God alone.

Having acknowledged these critical problems, both of which will become evident in my interpretation of the first two plays within the cycle, *The Creation* and *The Killing of Abel*, I now turn to providing an overview of the dramatist's construction of work in the Old Testament plays, which will precede my analysis of the plays. The dramatist strikingly conveys how urgently Christ's death upon the cross is desired and needed and to what extent humankind is capable of eliciting this salvific remedy through its own inept commerce.

The Towneley *Creation* enables the dramatist to establish God's work as archetypal, to present the commodity of God's superabundance as recognizably material, and to identify the conflict between God and humankind as represented through the gesture of work. By introducing the theme of undercompensation (through the Cherubim) and equating that deprivation with humankind's need for God, the dramatist sets into motion the fullness-emptiness dialectic which seeks fulfillment through Christ.

The Killing of Abel allows the dramatist to present divergent reactions to postlapsarian work, the initial depiction of which appears here rather than in *The Creation* play. By portraying Cain as a farmer whose crops yield him no gain and Abel as a shepherd who is locked in a right-relationship with God, the dramatist presents the historical repercussions of work and reveals how humankind tries to reaccess God's superabundance. Ritualistic

enactment enables the dramatist to transform Cain's killing of Abel into a deed promising redemption, which is transacted through exchange.

In *Noah* the dramatist represents the themes of superabundance and undercompensation through Noah's infusion of God's grace, enabling Noah to overcome his own limitations, resulting in his construction of the ark. By employing typology and reinforcing the fullness-emptiness dialectic, the dramatist anticipates the more efficacious work: redemption. *Abraham* enables the dramatist to represent the unquantifiable quantity, or God's superabundance, through the cornucopian image suggested by the ram. This miraculous gift reifies the Father's promise to sacrifice the Son and renders redemption palpable and imminent. The dramatist appears to transmute the object of sacrifice into the ram by focusing attention offstage and therefore portrays bounty as accessible even if inexplicably timed.

The Towneley *Creation*

The Towneley dramatist begins constructing the model for God's superabundance and humankind's prefigured undercompensation during the play's first scene. During that scene, set in heaven, God begins creating the cosmos, proclaims his work pleasant, and accepts joyous praise from the Cherubim. But he inexplicably leaves his throne before the creation of man. In speech parodying God's, Lucifer vaunts himself as brighter than the sun and seats himself in God's throne. Scenes two and four, set in hell, are actually one extended scene, interrupted by God's creation of Adam and Eve in scene three. Scenes two and four dramatize the fallen angels, who bemoan their lost brilliance, and Lucifer who, in Scene Four, bristles that the station he has lost is now occupied by newly created man. The concluding twelve leaves of the play's manuscript have been lost, presumably containing Satan's temptation of Eve and Adam and Eve's subsequent expulsion from Eden.[12]

The overbounteousness of God's work serves as a paradigm that creates tension between God's oversufficiency and humankind's legacy of undercompensation. God's work of creation is imprinted upon spectators in a ritualistic manner through the Cherubim's recitation of the cosmic myth, which will be discussed as theorized by Mircea Eliade. Not only does the recitation of the myth invite reentry into the realm of the sacred and transcend the realm of the drama that nonetheless evokes the myth, it establishes (the primordial) God's model of work as exemplary. Related to this exemplarity is the associated attribute of the work, God's bounty. This bounty, which appears to be withdrawn during the opening play, is strategically employed as an exacerbating principle; the dramatist suggests that the lost abundance might be retrievable. This state of affairs escalates within the cycle, triggering a sort of buyer's panic, seen manifestly in *Lazarus*, which mandates the redemptive sacrifice.[13]

Jeanne S. Martin's investigation into the cycle's archetypal patterns is directly related to this study's concern with how work is constructed in Towneley. Martin contends that individual plays within the Towneley cycle relate to one another paradigmatically, not developmentally. The cycle reflects Eusebius of Caesarea's view of history as a series of recurring patterns rather than Augustine's view of history as a linear, one-directional process. Whether Augustine's or Eusebius's historiographical views prevail in the cycle is a question that extends beyond the aim of this essay. Yet Martin's comments on *The Creation* remain instrumental to this paper for what they reveal about "the relation of the ontological order to its creator."[14]

The model for a recurring pattern of equitable return is established during *The Creation*. Martin states that God and the Cherubim use language of "reciprocity and solidarity" to establish the "unitary nature of the creation." Lucifer, declaring himself the source of his own brightness, sets up an asymmetrical relationship with God.[15] In Martin's construction, the Cherubim, who are

represented as one character, would bask in a supersaturated atmosphere, spokespersons for a closed-circuit system characterized by reciprocity and solidarity. Yet, as I will reveal, this apparent reciprocity is undermined when exploited by the dramatist, who introduces the idea of undercompensation. Martin notes the lexical repetition in the Cherubim's language. For example, she points out the Cherubim's use of the phrase "myrth and lovyng" (ll. 62-63) to describe both "the creation's response to its creator and . . . the creator's response to the creation."[16] As Martin describes them, the Cherubim do seem to be joyful observers of God's work of Creation and apparent recipients of its bounteousness.

Before taking issue with Martin's contention that the relationship between God and the Cherubim is one of reciprocity and solidarity, I wish to focus momentarily upon an attribute of the archetypal worker: the superabundance in which the Cherubim appear to participate. God's sense of overgenerativity is captured in the cycle as Deus proclaims: "All maner thyng is in my thoght, / Withoutten me ther may be noght, / ffor all is in my sight" (13-15). This all-encompassing, all-expansive vision precedes the act of creation. God's oversufficiency seems to explain why, in a less generative sense, he proclaims his work pleasant (42) with only a portion of his work completed. Moreover, his foreknowledge seems related to this overextensive phenomenon, which can be construed as a forward-propelling, goal-achieving system. For example, God blows the breath of life into man; and before Adam can arise from the earth, God announces that Adam will know both good and evil (165-70).

Insofar as reciprocity implies a mutual giving and getting, it is true that God gives material form and receives praise while the Cherubim give praise and receive joy from basking in the overabundance of the material forms. But the relationship is not really one of reciprocity. Even though the asymmetrical relationship between God and Fallen Man is not explicitly

prefigured until Lucifer parodies God, there is a sense of undercompensation reflected through the Cherubim. Specifically, this is indicated when they mention Lucifer's extreme brightness (67-68), which Martin states is a potential differentiating factor posing no threat to the divine order insofar as it is revealed as subordinate to inclusion. She points out that no sooner do the Cherubim mention that God has created Lucifer brighter than the others than they emphasize their own brightness.[17]

It seems more likely that God's overplenitude, having manifested itself in the angelic population, creates a certain tension, perhaps not recognized as such by the Cherubim themselves. Thomas J. Jambeck explains this phenomenon through relating Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* to his reading of the play. Aquinas, having been influenced by Anselm, provides an explanation for the Cherubim's underacquisition: "[T]he cherubim intuit, albeit obliquely, that further bliss is possibly theirs, a beatitude which promises a direct and immediate participation in the divine life."[18]

The overendowment of brightness upon Lucifer can only be attributed to God. Because it is mentioned in the context of God's act of creation, Lucifer's overbrilliance seems to suggest an overflow of ontic substance. Martin's analysis of the lexical repetition in the Cherubim's speech does not take into account the structural pattern of the lines (61-76). In the stanza's first section (61-66), the Cherubim praise God and express their mirth and love. These initial lines affirm the all-encompassing nature of God, document his generative power, and express the unending joy the Cherubim have received from their Creator. Directing new words of praise to God in the stanza's second section, the Cherubim shift their emphasis away from the physical properties of God's work (heaven and earth) and toward its overabundant quality, which ostensibly manifests itself in Lucifer's distinguishing overbrightness (67-74). These lines substantiate that it is the "sight" of Lucifer which generates "grete ioy" within the

Cherubim, not whatever attributes might be associated with the differentiating brightness itself. Lucifer's superbrightness, their lines suggest, might result in an overexpressive, reciprocated love: "we loue the, lord, bright ar we, / bot none of vs so bright as he" (69-70). Concluding the stanza, the Cherubim direct the utmost thoughts of love they can muster toward their Maker (75-76).

The Cherubim link Lucifer's distinguishing luminescence to God's might: "Lord, thou art full mych of myght, / that has maide lucifer so bright" (67-68). However, they mention their own (under)brilliance in language of compensation, suggesting underacquisition: "we loue the, lord, bright ar we" (69). These words appear to contain an apology; it seems they protest too much. The attribute of their brightness should have no bearing upon whether God reciprocates their love, and certainly as their Creator he knows exactly how bright they are. Rather, their words seem to convey an awareness that the less-bright have less love to bestow than the brighter; further, they hint at a desire for remediation. Therefore, the imbalance noted by the Cherubim results in a reacquisition process. God's overbounteousness, not having been appropriated equally among the angels, creates tension demanding resolution.

The Cherubim's perception that they suffer from underendowment helps to explain humankind's compulsion for satiation, which drives the cycle, but does not address another integral purpose they serve as narrators of the cosmic myth. Stage directions do not indicate whether they appear together with Deus at the beginning of the play. Even if they do, their response to God's work of creation clearly serves some purpose other than demonstrating the reciprocity and solidarity that, Martin maintains, dominate the play's opening scene. God does not respond to their words of praise and instead leaves the scene, a theological impossibility since God is omnipresent. It is God's departure that enables Lucifer to represent him and signals, as one critic has said, "Let there be drama."[19] While God's leaving can be explained by

dramatic necessity, his not responding to the Cherubim is rather curious.

The Cherubim narrate the cosmic myth, as will be shown, but they cannot be considered the "voice of the Church" inasmuch as they are not detached, philosophically aware, or collectively wise.[20] Throughout the opening scene of *The Creation*, Deus neither responds to nor acknowledges them; this is quite unusual within a cosmos reflecting reciprocity and solidarity. This lack of acknowledgment could suggest many things: that Martin's argument about solidarity is erroneous, that the Cherubim serve as a non-participatory audience within the play, or that their ritual function is being emphasized.

It seems most conceivable to me that the Cherubim serve as contemporary mythtellers, who rather rhythmically and euphoniously tell what happened *ab origine*. This role transcends but does not expunge the prefigurative function they also serve; it also explains how the prototype for work becomes implanted in spectators' minds. The divine work of creation, as Mircea Eliade has shown, demonstrates "a superabundance of reality" brought about from "an excess of power, an overflow of energy. Creation is accomplished by a surplus of ontological substance." However dramatically effective God's work of creation may have been, it is the narration of that creation myth that establishes the myth as truth.[21]

All creation myths explain how the amorphous mass of chaos is transformed into matter.[22] Since the Judaeo-Christian God created the cosmos *ex nihilo*, the Cherubim evoke a familiar iconographic image, the syndesmos gesture, where God is seen with extended or raised arms, perhaps holding the *mappa mundi*. Art historians establish the close connection between this expansive gesture and the lexicological term associated with the image, God's "bidyng."[23] The Cherubim imprint the image by connecting the well-known gesture to cosmic density: "thou has made, with thi bidyng, / Heuen, & erth, and *all that is*" (emphasis mine, 64-65).

The incantatory rhythm of the Cherubim's opening lines and Deus's refusal to acknowledge their presence does, in itself, suggest that their purpose extends beyond reflecting the majesty of God and the splendor of his work. The "supreme function of the myth," Eliade indicates, "is to 'fix' the paradigmatic models for . . . all significant activities," one of which is work.[24] Through their recitation of the cosmic myth, the Cherubim invite the audience to reenter the supersaturated cosmos being represented. Further, they "fix" God's overplenteous work as a paradigmatic model for all work.

The tension between God's superabundance and humankind's legacy of undercompensation is heightened whenever postlapsarian man despairs over the immense bounty he has lost. Even Towneley's Lucifer, having been cast down to hell, bemoans the inequity: "Who wend euer this tyme haue seyn? / We, that in sich myrth haue beyn, / That we shuld suffre so mych wo?" (250-53). As expressed by Lucifer, the deprivation is both physical and spiritual. God's overplenitude is physically manifested in material forms but spiritually manifested through fellowship. For example, in Towneley God blows the breath of life into Adam, states that he will know both good and evil, and describes the luxuriant setting in which Adam will "walk . . . in this worthely wone, / In all this welthly wyn" (184-85). In his homily on *Paradise*, Ambrose questions whether it was equitable for God to provide Adam with a helpmate who then jeopardized his legacy, and decides: "the Lord must have gained more pleasure for Himself in being responsible for all creation than condemnation from us for providing the basis for sin" (10, 47). When we consider Ambrose's sense of equitable return, the correlationship between God and man suggests an indelicate balance, with God's consummate pleasure at his overall work of creation seen as overriding humankind's disgruntlement over his provision of Eve.

Because the remaining twelve leaves of *The Creation* are no longer extant, the influence of God's paradigmatic model upon

humankind's postlapsarian labor must be analyzed with regard to *The Killing of Abel*, the second play in the Towneley manuscript. Cain perceives God's overabundance as a withheld commodity, and his own sense of underacquisition is everywhere apparent. Not until Christ's death upon the cross will the tension between God's superabundance and humankind's undercompensation be ameliorated in the spiritual sense.

The Killing of Abel

While evil cannot corrupt God's overplentifulness by contaminating the paradigmatic model set into motion during *The Creation*, it does engage humankind in a system of asymmetrical return. Cain views his own underacquisition as being imposed upon him by a bounteous God. Therefore, his non-productive land, his recalcitrant plow team, and his insubordinate servant are testimony to that withheld bounty, to which he feels entitled. In *The Creation* the Cherubim, who prefigure humankind's underacquisition, accept God's work of creation as overplentiful in ways they cannot adequately fathom. Cain, on the other hand, views God's overbounteousness as a withheld commodity. Ambrose has discussed the fact that Cain's status as a tiller of the soil was lower than that of Abel, who herded sheep (*Cain and Abel* 1, 3, 11). This social stratification translates into a sort of "superbrilliance" manifested by Abel. Not only does Abel's tithe consist of a fat, sleek sheep—and Ambrose clarifies that living things are superior to inanimate things (1, 10, 42)—but his tithe offers return for return. Abel's own relationship with God is clearly one of *quid pro quo*, and he exacerbates Cain's plight by (perhaps unintentionally) calling attention to his brother's unproductive land: "god giffys the all thi lifyng" (98) and "all the good thou has in wone / Of godis grace is bot a lone" (116-17).

Abel's superbrilliance recalls Lucifer's overbrightness, a distinguishing characteristic that could have been bestowed upon

him only by God. Whereas Lucifer exalted himself above God, being so presumptuous as to seat himself in God's throne, Abel dreads and reveres God (244-45, 257-58). This right-relationship with God seems to prime the pump of God's blessings, assuring future plenty. Yet Cain, through no reason of his own, has been consigned to the soil like his father. He, like the Cherubim, perceives himself as "underbrilliant," that is, underendowed.[25] Embittered, Cain projects his own underbrilliance upon God. Instead of conceptualizing God seated on high as Abel envisions him, Cain treats God like a puppet in a Punch-and-Judy show, answering God's call with, "Whi, who is that hob-ouer-the-wall? / we! who was that that piped so small?" (297-98).[26] This rag-doll God, no bestower of bounty he, is a mockery, but remains at third-removes from the God Cain is really angry at. Cain's insulting attack on the represented God fails to resolve the more serious issue of why the eternal God distributes his overabundance so inequitably.

Critics of the Towneley play have often mentioned that the dramatist inveigles spectators into siding with Cain by considering themselves "Cain's men," as Garcio suggests (20). [27] Specifically, spectators would have sympathized with the injustice of a subsistence farmer being pressed to return a tithe to God which only ends up in the priest's pockets (104-05). But the material reality of the ecclesiastical authorities' unwise use of God's funds does not excuse Cain from the obligation of tithing. As G. R. Owst explains, medieval preachers repeatedly warned their parishioners against withholding their tithes or tithing falsely.[28] However, Cain sees the induced tithe as an external manifestation of a more complex problem than compliance with ecclesiastical authority (or with God himself). Cain's sense of undercompensation, I suggest, is just as spiritual as it is material. As he proclaims to Abel, "ffor I am ich yere wars then othere" (109). Although he cannot articulate the source of his grievance, it is obvious that the farther he strays from Eden (out of God's blessing) the more diminished

his return will be. Gregory the Great has asserted that only Adam, who was once entitled to God's bounty, would distinctly remember what he had lost.[29] Thus, God's superabundance, bestowed upon Cain's father but distant to Cain, deteriorates into his sense that a zero loss is somewhat better than a zero return. He is protective of, although not reconciled to, the *status quo*; this is evidenced when Abel insists that Cain tithe, and Cain reacts, "it is better hold that I haue / then go from doore to doore & craue" (142-43). In rather bizarre fashion, Cain moves forward chronologically but backward ritualistically. In historical time, Cain moves from a memory of surplus toward an action of deprivation. He accomplishes this by moving forward from the (indistinct) memory of possessing God's superabundance toward the *status quo*, where he loses nothing but gains nothing, and, finally, forward yet again toward withholding bounty from God. This logical temporal progression situates Cain in a downward spiritual spiral, which ends in a plunge into hell, the progressive course taken by many of the doomed characters, for example, by Judas.

Whereas the chronological movement is detrimental to Cain, the ritualistic movement he enacts is efficacious to humankind. The dramatist strikingly reenacts a cosmogonic act, a creation ritual, in which Cain plays God and Abel plays overgenerative victim, whose spilled blood energizes the universe. This cosmogony, as reenacted by Cain, does not contradict the *ex nihilo* creation, in which the Judaeo-Christian God forms the cosmos from an amorphous mass. Rather, this primordial murder demonstrates—powerfully and unequivocally—the need for reappropriation. The catalyst for this reappropriation remains Abel, whose typological significance as a figure for Christ would have been instantly recognized. Not until Christ's death upon the cross, which Abel's death prefigures, will God's superabundance be again accessible to humankind.

If this slaying failed to be recognized as a cosmogonic act, its significance would have certainly been recognized within the

context of the plow play. Edmund Reiss discusses this folk drama enacted in England on Plow Monday, the day following Epiphany. Actors in disguise (mummers) performed the plays, associated with a fertility ritual, "to celebrate the return to work after the Christmas festivities." The key moment of the play turned on the slaying of an innocent victim, who (unlike Abel) was later revived by a Doctor, after which a collection-plate was passed among the audience.[30] Reiss explains that the Towneley play closely parallels this thematic structure; after Abel is slain, Garcio, Cain's servant, begs food and drink from the audience. Equally as interesting as these ritualistic enactments is the figure of the plow, which remains onstage during the course of the play. Whether it should be interpreted as suggesting a type of the cross, as Christ the plowman who will deliver the land from its thorns, or as a social instrument, the unbudgeable plow nonetheless serves as a concrete reminder about how fruitless human labor can be.

Although spectators know that Abel will be liberated from hell by Christ, it is quite disturbing that his work, however keenly aligned with God's plan, is nonetheless inadequate. What Abel cannot effectuate is amelioration of humankind's spiritual plight, which will remain unalleviated for over four millennia. However, as a precursor of Christ, Abel has been viewed as successfully fulfilling his mission. For example, Kolve and Woolf both discuss the double typological significance of Abel. The lamb which he offers as a tithe typifies the eucharistic sacrifice, but the most important typological connection is Abel's death, which prefigures the Crucifixion. Indeed, Kolve states that "Abel's place in the drama depends above all on his murder."[31] Despite his acknowledged figural importance, Abel is not the hero of the play; Woolf explains that Cain, not Abel, receives more dramatic attention, even during his slaying of Abel.[32] Critics have viewed Abel's mission as sufficient in that Abel accomplishes all that is possible for him to do. But when we consider Abel's effectiveness as an appropriator of superabundance, I believe that he falls short.

Abel's blood, crying out from the ground for vengeance, goes unheeded for almost five thousand years (328-29). The implication that the contributory efforts of the faithful die with them in the ground is disquieting and taunting, demanding remediation.

In the plays of the patriarchs, *Noah* and *Abraham,* grace issues forth from the heavens, dignifying human labor by imbuing both Noah and Abraham with supernatural strength to overcome physical frailty or spiritual weakness. While for Noah this suffusion of grace manifests itself through the recognizable work-gesture of carpentry, for Abraham his belief produces exchangeable commodity: Isaac the son is spared by the ram. Divine intervention attunes spectators to the prospect of a saving commodity, and the cornucopian plenty suggested by the ram becomes analogous to the concept of God's bounty.

Noah

In *Noah* God's overbounteousness arrives in the imperceptible form of grace, much like a priceless commodity acquired through the patriarch's prayer. Only through the indwelling of the Spirit does Noah acquire surpassing power, enabling him to overcome physical and spiritual limitations: old age, feebleness, and a conviction that he is unworthy to perform the daunting task of constructing the ark. Noah's opening prayer bears some resemblance to Christ's prayer to the Father at Gethsemane: both invocations lament human weakness and gain an immediate response from God, fortifying flesh and spirit. While the typological significance of Noah as a type of Christ constructing the ark as a type of the Church has often been discussed, typology cannot explain what becomes evident as a conflict between ability and desire.

Noah's opening prayer expresses humankind's desperate need of salvation and conveys its collective desire for a Redeemer: "Oyle of mercy [God] Hus hight / As I haue Hard red, / To euery

lifyng wight / that wold luf hym and dred" (46-47). As Han-Jürgen Diller has demonstrated, the patriarchs of the Towneley cycle, unlike its counterpart cycles, convey "something like a desire for the coming of Christ." This "mood of longing," whether conveyed through dialogue indicating anticipatory desire or reified through actions leading toward its fulfillment, consistently permeates the cycle.[33] Further, it seems to me that desire becomes analogous to emptiness and may be communicated to spectators through action, dialogue, or gesture.

Specifically, Noah conveys his protracted desire for the Redeemer, a yearning which has been left unabated, by proclaiming his unflagging faith in God's fullness (1, 65). This seems to be expressed through what Noah describes as his own withering away, his deflation: "And now I wax old, / seke, sory, and cold, / As muk apon mold / I widder away" (60-63). While elapsing years, decades, or centuries often serve to quantify in the cycle that which remains incalculable—the extent to which humankind needs a Savior—Noah's sense of withering away seems to mirror humankind's worsening condition. Deus, heeding Noah's call, repents having made man (91), whom he characterizes as having transmuted emptiness into a debased form of fullness: "full low ligis he, / In erth hymself to stuf / with syn that displeasse me" (84-85).

That God's overabundance can transform the human agency of work is illustrated when Noah surmounts his limitations through the act of carpentry. As the ark takes shape according to God's blueprint, it resembles a medieval ship, reinforcing the pride and importance of the shipwright's craft. Lynn White, Jr., confirms the rising status accorded to carpenters during the fifteenth century, an outgrowth of the enhanced image of Joseph, which was promulgated through the cult bearing his name.[34]

Inability exacerbated by desire intensifies Noah's plight. Only an influx of grace brings forth a sign of divine assistance (253-56). This infusion of God's imbuing strength is aptly

depicted in *The Holkham Bible Picture Book* through a tree curving downward with Noah as he leans over to perform his work.[35] Yet doubts mitigated by desire impose themselves upon his construction of the ark; the patriarch bemoans his breaking back, his doddering old age, and his brittle bones (264-65). As Diller states, the Towneley dramatist depicts the process of Noah's work rather than its static result. Not only is he portrayed as tiring by degrees, but we are able to discern the very moment when satisfaction arises in him as the perfected ark takes shape (276), despite his limitations as a craftsman.[36] In economic terms, labor expended is compensated when the product of that labor is exchanged for money or its counterpart (equitable goods and services); and estimated exchange value of a commodity is based upon a presumption of utility.[37] Noah employs this transactive language after having completed the ark: "This will euer endure / therof am I paide; / ffor why? / It is better wroght / Then I coude haif thoght" (283-86). Through its forecasted utility of being able to withstand the flood, Noah's ark is indeed a fitting and finished work.

The co-mixture of worldly and mystical work in *Noah* seems to enunciate the vanity of human commerce when deprived of God's bounty. While the external manifestation of Noah's mission, the ark, will survive the deluge, souls produced in the postdiluvian world will join those lost in the flood. Noah's sacred work does not sufficiently compensate God for humankind's sin, nor does it offer hope that sin can be ameliorated through the vessel alone. God makes a covenant with Noah after the flood, as established in Genesis 9:8-17, that he will never destroy humankind with rains again. But sin continues to inundate the earth. Deus tells Abraham in the following play that the patriarch's ancestors have continued to fall prey to pride and other sins (49-52). Only God's overbounteousness can expiate human sin, as Noah seems to convey in his closing lines. Asked by his wife whether those lost can escape the pains of hell, Noah is

uncertain but invests his faith in God's grace (550-58). Diller explains that the Old Testament patriarchs convey "uncertainty about the fate of their forebears and a vague hope of salvation," feelings that link them to the audience.[38]

As critics have discussed the typological importance of Noah, the just man's mission is seen as adequate to its purpose: his work is good enough. For example, Woolf in considering Noah a type of Christ and the ark a type of the cross and the Church, states that "conflict between virtue and vice" is absent and the purpose of the Noah episode is to foreshadow the Redemption.[39] Were Noah's work sufficient enough, in Towneley, a protestation of this assurance would exist. Yet in the subsequent play, *Abraham*, the devout patriarch signals to the audience that he, like Noah and his ancestors, will be incapable of effectuating what is most ameliorative to humankind. These disturbing sentiments are clear in Abraham's prognostication that, however faithful he may be, his work seems a futile gesture: "Now help, lord, adonay! / ffor, certis, I can no better wone, / And ther is none that better may" (*Abraham* 46-48).

Abraham

That Abraham sacrificing Isaac would have been recognized as typifying the Father offering up his Son was frequently emphasized in a range of sources.[40] A sermon in John Mirk's *Festial* reinforces the connection: "by Abraham 3e schull vndyrstonde þe Fadyr of Heuen, and by Isaac his sonne Ihesu Crist."[41] That the redistribution of God's superabundance is close at hand is depicted in this play through the ram, which the Church Fathers established as a type of Christ.[42] The ram becomes further intriguing because it is equated with miraculous intervention through God's mercy. Isaac asks why no animal accompanies the pair as they ascend the hill (167-68), yet spectators cannot help but note that the beast is nonetheless there (262).[43] God's plenty is

furthermore portrayed in the play as accessible; in order to propagate, Isaac must survive. God's promise to Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars contains within it an assurance of Isaac's survival. Yet the spiritual counterpart of this projected bounty, a corresponding harvest of souls, remains a distant hope without a Redeemer. The redemptive sacrifice is further evoked through the stage-action of Isaac bearing a bundle of sticks upon his back. Whether the enactment of shouldering a burdensome weight was recognized as work or not, its theological import would have remained clear. The compendium of biblical typology *Miroure of Mans Salvacionne* establishes that "ysaac on his awen shulderes / wodde mekely bare & broght" and makes the typological connection: "crist bare on hys shuldres / a cross fulle hevy and lange."[44]

When we remember that Isaac is a type of Christ, Abraham's offering-up and receiving-back can be recognized as the Passion and Resurrection.[45] Inasmuch as Isaac escapes from immolation and a ram is substituted in his stead, patristic commentary reassigns the type of Christ as now signified by the ram.[46] This typological link has been much discussed, but the cornucopian plenty suggested by the ram has not.[47] That bounty is suggested in the play in several ways through the horns of the ram. The ram becomes entangled in the bush because of his horns; God's bounty remains present although unseen. The horns as cornucopian emblem represent the projected multitudes now enabled through Isaac's blood-line; that is, Isaac will survive and propagate because of the horns. In a less discernible way, the horn of salvation is suggested, which anticipates the substitutionary atonement as being the only sacrifice efficacious enough to yield soteriological plenitude to humankind.[48] What saves Isaac from certain death is the ram, which, unlike the animal Abel has been viewed as offering up to God, inexplicably becomes visible as though created or produced; that is, as a gift. Marc Shell describes the cornucopia as the infinitely large gift which can be distinguished from Pauline

grace in that it does not convey the sense of being free (24). Certainly, legends about the Holy Grail, as narrated within vernacular literature, provide points of intersection with the idea of cornucopia reified by the ram in the Towneley play. Inasmuch as the ram typifies Christ, both symbolization and production, as Shell explains them, would be represented within the play.[49] The controversial issue of how a thing may both symbolize all things and remain the source of them is explained theologically through etymology in the Gospel of John (1:1-2): "Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God." Production becomes manifested through God made flesh in the Son.[50]

While the horn of salvation symbolized by the ram in the Towneley play is not a worldly thing, the ram itself is and through its immolation ceases to have reduplicating value. God's own promise that he will help humankind, the first proclamation of assurance he utters in the cycle, conditions spectators to expect to receive God's bounty (49). Further, there is no question that Isaac is equated with the ram; and as has been substantiated, the ram was well known to have signified Christ.[51] Deus commands Abraham at the outset: "take with the, Isaac, thi son, / As a beest to sacryfy" (70-71).

Only Christ's redemptive work will effectuate the release of God's bounty; therefore, Isaac's sacred work is not plentiful enough. While he is the beneficiary of God's overabundance, he is not capable of producing that commodity himself. For example, Kolve explains that even if Isaac had been sacrificed, his death would lack the efficacy to aid humankind, whether the living or the dead.[52] Even if desirous of doing so, Isaac cannot pay the price of human sin and therefore cannot perform work that is sufficiently salvific. However, critics who discuss Isaac's typological significance generally view the sacred work of Isaac, precursor of Christ, as adequate. While Isaac cannot bear the cross to Calvary, he can carry a bundle of sticks upon his back to the site of

sacrifice. Although he cannot die for humankind's sin, he can submit to the Father in willing acceptance of certain death. There is no question that within this typological construct he is heroic. Woolf notes that Isaac, and not Abraham, is the hero of the medieval plays. While the main point of the episode is to convey Abraham's test of faith, the dramatists seem to concentrate upon Isaac's consent, she states.[53] Moreover, Kolve establishes that the fulfillment of Christ's redemption *depends* upon Isaac as a figure.[54] Inasmuch as my focus upon work in the cycle evaluates work as it pertains to reacquiring God's bounty, I view Isaac and other precursors of Christ like Abel or Noah as coming up short in their labor. Within the construct I employ, the typological system poses limitations. Unlike the typological system, which gives hope and deems the patriarchs faithful workers whose contributions suffice, the compensatory system that I posit reveals that unless God's superabundance is released, all work, at times including Christ's work before the redemptive sacrifice, is clearly inefficacious.[55]

The Towneley dramatist creates a sense of heightened tension which seeks alleviation through Christ's redemptive work on Calvary; he therefore draws attention to the enormous bounty humankind has lost. By portraying the supersaturated universe represented in the cycle's opening play as fraught with potential for reacquisition, he invites spectators to identify with work as a means of reaccessing that plentiful state. This work, already accomplished by the worker-exemplar God, has been lost by, and therefore must be regained through, humankind. Not until Lazarus speaks out in bitterness and pain for all those suffering spiritual deprivation does this unameliorated tension reach crisis proportions. Staunchly faithful, consummately productive Old Testament figures like Noah or Abraham appear to have worked in vain, their works woefully insufficient as evidenced when the patriarchs land in hell.

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Notes

[1] On Christ's role in the plays, see Barbara I. Gusick, "Christ as a Worker in the Towneley Cycle," diss., Loyola U Chicago, 1996. On Ambrose and the drama, see John E. Bernbrock's "Notes on the Towneley *Slaying of Abel*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 62 (1963): 317-322. Bernbrock has demonstrated that a close correspondence between Ambrose's homily on *Cain and Abel* and the Towneley *Killing of Abel* play can be substantiated. The play so noticeably parallels certain elements in Ambrose's text that Bernbrock concludes the dramatist undoubtedly employed it as a source (317).

[2] I employ the term "dramatist" to designate the "Wakefield author" whom Martin Stevens considers not only the cycle's chief writer, reviser, and compiler, but its dominant editorial voice. *Four Middle English Mystery Cycles: Textual, Contextual, and Critical Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) 156-57.

[3] My dramatic interpretation of the cosmogony (God's act of creation) advanced in this essay derives from Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1959) 68-113 passim.

[4] See Gusick, "Christ as a Worker," chapter 2. In this chapter, "The Construction of Christ," I propose an economic model, suggested by medieval sources, that explains how Christ's work functions within the plays.

[5] George Ovitt, Jr., *The Restoration of Perfection: Labor and Technology in Medieval Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1987) 60.

[6] David C. Fowler, *The Bible in Middle English Literature* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1984) 133-34.

[7] V. A. Kolve, *The Play Called Corpus Christi* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1966) 64-65.

[8] Robert A. Brawer, "St. Augustine's Two Cities as Medieval Dramatic Exempla," *Medievalia* 4 (1978): 225.

[9] St. Ambrose, *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, trans. John J. Savage, Fathers of the Church Series 42 (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1961) v-vi. Citations to *Hexameron* (and in a few cases, his corollary writings) refer to book, chapter, and section (paragraph), respectively.

[10] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. V. E. Watts (New York: Penguin, 1969) Book 3, 10, p. 101.

[11] David Mills, "Characterisation in the English Mystery Cycles: A Critical Prologue," *Medieval English Theatre* 5 (1983): 13.

[12] The edition of the Towneley plays used is George England and Alfred W. Pollard, eds., *The Towneley Plays*, Early English Text Society ES 71 (London: Oxford UP, 1897). A more recent edition is available: Martin Stevens and A. C. Cawley, eds., *The Towneley Plays*, 2 vols., Early English Text Society SS 13, 14 (New York: Oxford UP, 1994).

[13] See Barbara I. Gusick, "Time and Unredemption: Perceptions of Christ's Work in the Towneley *Lazarus*," *Fifteenth-Century Studies* 22 (1995): 19-41.

[14] Jeanne S. Martin, "History and Paradigm in the Towneley Cycle," *Medievalia et Humanistica* ns 8 (1977): 125-45, especially 128-30.

[15] Martin 129-32.

[16] Martin 130. On the role of the Cherubim, see William A. Scally's "Four Concepts of Time in Corpus Christi Drama," *Proceedings of the PMR Conference* 6 (1987): 79-87. Scally contends that the angels are already onstage when the play opens. They therefore constitute an audience within the play who witness God's act of creation. Spectators of the play therefore see the Cherubim as much like themselves, he states (82).

[17] Martin 130. Or as Louis Charles Stagg queries about the complicated play, why "would the Almighty, 'the Alpha and Omega, the Life, / the Way, the first and the last' create a Prince of Light, a Lucifer, the most beautiful of all creatures, to whom the Angels sang 'Sanctus' after his creative efforts?" See Stagg's "The Concept of Creation in Haydn's Oratorio *The Creation*, the Medieval Mystery Cycles, and Bernstein's *Mass*," *Interpretations: Studies in Language and Literature* 7.1 (1975): 13. Further, Robert A. Brawer notes that the Cherubim praise God most of all for having created Lucifer, thereby prefiguring the heavenly schism. See Brawer's "Dramatic Technique in the Corpus Christi Creation and Fall," *Modern Language Quarterly* 32.4 (December 1971): 357-58.

[18] Thomas J. Jambeck, "Anselm and the Fall of Lucifer in the Wakefield Creation Play," *Faith Seeking Understanding: Learning and the Catholic Tradition*, ed. George C. Berthold (Manchester, NH: Saint Anselm College P, 1991) 121.

[19] R. W. Hanning, "A Theater of Domestication and Entrapment: the Cycle Plays," *Approaches to Teaching Medieval English Drama*, ed. Richard Emmerson (New York: MLA, 1990) 116.

[20] See E. Catherine Dunn, "The Literary Style of the Towneley Plays," *American Benedictine Review* 20 (1969): 483-87. Although it is arguable whether the Cherubim fall under Dunn's

category of the "voice of the Church," they do, as R. W. Hanning points out, confirm God by singing the *Te Deum*. Their song moves *The Creation* more in the direction of liturgical celebration. See Hanning's "'You Have Begun a Parlous Pleye': The Nature and Limits of Dramatic Mimesis as a Theme in Four Middle English 'Fall of Lucifer' Cycle Plays," *The Drama in the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays*, ed. Clifford Davidson, C. J. Gianakaris, and John H. Stroupe (New York: AMS, 1982) 146.

[21] Eliade 45, 95-97.

[22] For example, in the Babylonian creation myth *Enuma Elish*, the god Marduk slays the monster Tiamat, creating the sky with one half of her slain corpse and the earth with the other half. See Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1951) 9.

[23] See Pamela Sheingorn, "The Visual Language of Drama: Principles of Composition," *Contexts for Early English Drama*, ed. Marianne Briscoe and John C. Coldewey (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) 182. See also Clifford Davidson, "Stage Gesture in Medieval Drama," *Atti del IV Colloquio della Société internationale pour l'étude du théâtre médiéval*, ed. M. Chiabò et al. (Viterbo, Italy: Centro studi sul teatro medioevale e rinascimentale, 1984) 474; and M. D. Anderson, *Drama and Imagery in English Medieval Churches* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1963) 141.

[24] Eliade 98.

[25] That God has not given Cain anything contributes to his withholding of a tithe; see Dorrel T. Hanks, Jr., "The *Mactacio Abel* and the Wakefield Cycle: A Study in Context," *The Southern Quarterly* 16.1 (October 1977): 52.

[26] Eleanor Prosser points out that this line would have generated laughter, not at Cain but at God. God lacks stature, she explains, and is ineffective even as the "omnipresent truth" being signified by the play. See Prosser's *Drama and Religion in the English Mystery Plays* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1961) 79.

[27] Regarding this type of tropological entrapment, see Robert Hanning, "A Theater," 119-20.

[28] See G. R. Owst, *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961) 365-66. On the connection between preachers, their admonitions regarding tithing, and humankind's consignment to hell for failing to heed warnings, see J. D. W. Crowther, "The Wakefield Cain and the 'Curs' of the Bad Tither," *Parergon* 24 (August 1979): 19-24.

[29] See Book Four, p. 189. *Saint Gregory, Saint Gregory the Great: Dialogues*, Fathers of the Church Series 39, trans. Odo John Zimmerman (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1959). On the theme of spiritual rent and Cain as the unfaithful husbandman of the parable in Matthew 21:33-41, see David Lyle Jeffrey's "Stewardship in the Wakefield *Mactacio Abel* and *Noe* Plays," *American Benedictine Review* 22.1 (March 1971): 64-76, especially 70-73.

[30] Edmund Reiss, "The Symbolic Plow and Plowman and the Wakefield *Mactacio Abel*," *Studies in Iconography* 5 (1979): 12-13.

[31] Kolve 66-67.

[32] Rosemary Woolf, *The English Mystery Plays* (1972; Berkeley: U of California P, 1980) 124-25.

[33] Hans-Jürgen Diller, "Theological Doctrine and Popular Religion in the Mystery Plays," *Religion in the Poetry and Drama of the Late Middle Ages in England*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990) 204-06.

[34] Lynn White, Jr., "The Technology of Temperantia and the Virtuousness of Technology," *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of E. H. Harbison*, ed. Theodore K. Rabb and Jerrold E. Seigel (Princeton; Princeton UP, 1969) 185. Rpt. in *Medieval Religion and Technology: Collected Essays*, ed. Lynn White, Jr. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978) 181-204.

[35] See *The Holkham Bible Picture Book*, ed. W. O. Hassall (London: Dropmore, 1954) fol. 7, 72.

[36] See Hans-Jürgen Diller, "The Craftsmanship of the Wakefield Master," *Medieval English Drama: Essays Critical and Contextual*, ed. Jerome Taylor and Alan H. Nelson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972) 248.

[37] See Gusick, "Christ as a Worker," chapter 2.

[38] Hans-Jürgen Diller, "Theological" 207.

[39] Woolf, *English Mystery* 133.

[40] On the typology of the sacrifice of Isaac, see Jean Danièlou, *From Shadows to Reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers*, trans. Wulstan Hibberd (London: Burns and Oates, 1960) 115-30. Abraham believed that God desired him to kill Isaac but that God would miraculously do what he was capable of: resurrect the child (123).

[41] See Theodor Erbe, ed., *Mirk's Festial: A Collection of Homilies*,

Part I, Early English Text Society ES 96 (London: Kegan Paul, 1905) 77-78.

[42] Note that Rosemary Woolf substantiates that the emotional component of the ram appearing in Isaac's stead is usually glossed over: "[T]he release of Isaac with the sacrifice of the ram is normally represented in a markedly perfunctory manner, and without the emotional emphasis which on the ordinary level of the story it would seem to deserve." See Woolf's "The Effect of Typology on the English Medieval Plays of Abraham and Isaac," *Speculum* 32 (1957): 824.

[43] Whether a live animal was used to represent the ram is unclear. Thomas Rendall suggests that a doll might have been employed to represent the ram inasmuch as slaying a sheep onstage would have been a "messy business." See his "Visual Typology in the Abraham and Isaac Plays," *Modern Philology* 81.3 (February 1984): 230.

[44] See Alfred H. Huth, ed., *The Miroure of Mans Salvacionne* (London, 1888) 80.

[45] Danièlou 123.

[46] Danièlou clarifies Tertullian's patristic commentary. While Isaac carried his own bundle of sticks to the site of sacrifice, he was also saved by the wood through the ram, whose "horns (*cornibus haerens*) in a bush [were] offered instead." This pertains to Christ in that not only did Christ bear the cross upon his shoulders but hung "from the ends (*cornibus*) of the cross, with a crown of thorns on his head" (124-25).

[47] My argument is based upon Marc Shell's chapter "The Blank Check," only one sentence of which specifically mentions the ram

as an emblem of cornucopia (41). See his *Money, Language, and Thought: Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1982) 24-46.

[48] On the significance of the horn within a Christian context, see Shell 41n45. He cites Luke 1:69 and Psalms 132:17; we may add Revelation 5:6 as substantiation. Further connections between Christ and the horn can be found; see Stephen G. Nichols, Jr., *Romanesque Signs: Early Medieval Narrative and Iconography* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1983) 181-84.

[49] Shell describes production: a horn is a member of the group of worldly things; it is "homogeneous with its products and produces itself . . . a horn of plenty may produce a horn" (40). Yet the horn is also symbolic; it is not of this world (40-41).

[50] Shell 41.

[51] Danièlou explains that Isaac signified Christ's divinity whereas the ram signified his humanity (130). The typology of the Passion is "as it were divided between Isaac and the ram" (126). Further explanation of the ram may be found in Robert M. Longsworth's "Art and Exegesis in Medieval English Dramatizations of the Sacrifice of Isaac," *Educational Theatre Journal* 24.2 (May 1972): 119.

[52] Kolve 74.

[53] Woolf, "The Effect," 813.

[54] Kolve 74.

[55] See Pamela M. King's "Spatial Semantics and the Medieval Theatre," *The Theatrical Space*, Themes in Drama, ed. James

Redmond, vol. 9 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987). King demonstrates that the figural approach to medieval drama is static (47). She urges scholars to develop approaches that acknowledge "the moving, changing combinations of signs where the figural describes only the static" (57). On typology's "own refusal or failure to close or fix meaning," see James J. Paxson's "A Theory of Biblical Typology," *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies* 3.2 (Fall 1991): 381.